

We Will Dance Again: *The Hope of Eternal Life After Death*

If you have your Bible turn with me to 2 Cor. 5.

5 For we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. **2** For in this tent we groan, longing to put on our heavenly dwelling, **3** if indeed by putting it on we may not be found naked. **4** For while we are still in this tent, we groan, being burdened—not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. **5** He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee. 2 Cor. 5:1-5

Some years ago our family went on a church camping trip that was pretty much a disaster from start to finish. We've had better camping experiences since, but this was our first attempt and everything went wrong.

First of all, Matthew was only two years old, and he decided it was his solemn duty to eat as much dirt as he could. Every time we turned around he was putting dirt in his mouth! In addition, Janice had a sinus infection so she was feeling miserable. Then on our second day there a massive thunder storm rolled in and Jenn had gone for a walk with friends and we didn't know where she was so we're frantically driving around calling for our daughter with lightning cracking all around us.

After the storm, we discovered that our tent was pitched on the bottom of a hill. In dry weather that didn't seem to be a problem, but the storm brought so much rain so quickly that it formed a river rushing down the hill, that flooded our tent and soaked all our clothing and sleeping bags.

One other dynamic hanging over all this is that I was a brand new pastoral intern at this church so I felt pressure (all from my own pride) to look spiritual and like I had it all together, when everything was falling apart. That created a bit of tension between Janice and I.

That camping trip left me with the conviction that camping should only be attempted when there is a guarantee of perfect, sunny, warm, delightful, dry weather. Anything less, and I want to be home.

So when Paul compares our bodies to tents, my mind goes that camping trip. When the weather in our lives is sunny and bright, these old tents really aren't that bad. But storms come. Storms come. And these tents spring leaks. And life can get pretty miserable.

Paul says that in these tents we groan. As we get older, the groans begin to come more often! I groan every time I kneel down and try to get back up. The knees on this tent aren't what they used to be! The other day Ken happened to mention that he needs to get a running start just to get up from his couch. But over time as we age, these tents groan in many ways and for many reasons. The word groan means to sigh. Have you ever had something weighing so heavily on you that all you can do is sigh? Groans and sighs are wordless expressions of a heavy heart. Broken relationships cause our hearts to sigh. Financial worries cause us to sigh. We groan over the suffering not only in our lives, but at the suffering going on around us. We sigh and groan over the loss of a loved one.

As believers in Christ, Paul tells us what we are groaning for: *a new house!* Not the flimsy, temporary, leaky tent of these bodies, but the strong building of a new residence. Whether we know it or not, we long and groan to put off these decaying bodies and put on new bodies made by God. Resurrection bodies. Heavenly dwellings that are permanent.

Eternal life can only be enjoyed if we are in bodies that can handle eternity. We need bodies that won't wear down over time, won't grow sick or weary or old. Bodies that have as much energy after 5 million years as the moment we put them on.

And we can know with confidence that that's what God has prepared for us. Putting these bodies off doesn't leave us naked (unclothed) but further clothed:

For while we are still in this tent, we groan, being burdened—not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. 2 Cor. 5:4

We're not longing for death, that would be us unclothed, we're longing for further clothing. Death is the absence of life; Paul's talking about this life being overcome by an *increase* of life! Mortal life seamlessly transitioning into *more* life. Eternal, everlasting, forever life!

Deep inside, we know there's more than this life. We know it. Eccles. tells us God has set eternity in the heart of man. We know there's more, got to be more. This life is kind of like coming to the end of a show, and there are all kinds of loose ends still left unresolved. I was watching a two part British crime show where they finally caught a serial killer who in the face of the evidence against him, admitted to his crimes. Resolution. Justice. But then in the closing moments he is standing in court before the judge and when asked how he pled, he said, "not guilty." Then the show ended. What??? No!!! You can't leave it there. Does he get off? Is he convicted? It can't end there. That's when I discovered there's a season 2.

So, so many things happen in this world and we think, that can't be the end. It can't be! A crime never resolved. An injustice never made right. An innocent person spends 20 years in prison for a crime he/she didn't commit. Years they can never get back. A guilty person gets away with their crime and lives to a ripe old age never facing justice. A young person's life snatched away far too soon. A spouse's departure leaves an empty side of the bed, and an empty place in the remaining spouse's heart, that nothing else on earth can fill.

That can't be the end. There must be a season 2.

The groaning in these tents touch our hearts in a number of other ways. There's the passage of time and things change. Water flows under the bridge. The hands of time can't be turned back. Things are gained, but things are lost too.

Friends of ours posted a picture of the four of us, Janice and me, Rich and Debbie, from 1995. We were so young! Our kids were little kids. Matthew wasn't even born yet. And looking at it, I felt a strange feeling: it seems like yesterday. But those days are gone forever. I almost felt like I could be there again, but I can't. And I wouldn't want to...except I would take the 30 something body.

When you see a person in their late 80's or 90's know this: they're still the same person who once ran and played and worked with overflowing energy. Their tent has worn out, but their heart is still the same. They want to do the things they once did, they long, they groan to do what they once did, but they can't turn back the hands of time.

In Christ we hope – no, more than that, we know! – that mortal life will be swallowed up with immortal life. We will run and play and work again. We will dance again.

I came across a touching video of an elderly woman named Marta C. González Saldaña who was a ballerina in her younger years. Now she has Alzheimer's but something happens as she hears the music from Tchaikovsky's Swan Lake.

➤ **Play Marta C. González Saldaña video**

Our tents are wasting away and we groan. But these tents aren't the end of the story. If our faith is in Jesus Christ we will dance again!

⁵ He who has prepared us for this very thing (dancing again) is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee. ⁶ So we are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, ⁷ for we walk by faith, not by sight. ⁸ Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord. ⁹ So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him. ¹⁰ For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil. 2 Cor 5:5-10

When Jesus died for our sins, rose again, and ascended to the right hand of God, he gave us a guarantee of eternal life in the Person of the Holy Spirit who is our comforter and our guide through this life into the next. He will never leave or forsake us.

So we who believe in Christ are of good courage. Notice how Paul shifts from "we do not lose heart" to "we are of good courage"! Just the opposite of losing heart, we are confident, courageous, and bold because we know that while we live in this tent we are, as far as what we can see with our eyes, away from the Lord. We can't visibly see Jesus. We can't visibly see the glory of our God. What we see with our physical eyes are clay pots and worn out tents. But with eyes of faith we see the treasure in us: Christ!

I love where Paul takes this because we might think that looking forward to the next world will hamper our usefulness in this world. We've all heard the saying, **someone's so heavenly minded he's of no earthly good.**

I guess that is possible, but for Paul keeping the eternal in view leads to the exact opposite. He'd say you're so earthly minded you're of no earthly good. Or heavenly good.

We would rather be away from this body and with Christ. *To live is Christ and to die is gain.* God has a resurrected body waiting for us, and we long for that new home.

But while we live in this tent, Paul writes, *we make it our aim to please the Lord.* Not, "we sit around waiting for that day." Not, "we hang on for Jesus to come and take us home!" Instead, we aim our lives at

pleasing the Lord. Our lives are the arrows, the target is doing what pleases the Lord.

10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.

Season 2 is that every single person who has ever lived will stand before the judgment seat of Christ. Those who got away with murder, injustice, oppression, cruelty, extortion, cheating when season 1 ended will find out there's a season 2. They will answer to Jesus Christ, to God, to judgment.

But that's not the judgment that Paul is talking about here. When he says we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, he's talking about believers. We will be judged but it's not a judgment of condemnation. Jesus was already condemned in our place, so that we would never be condemned. Our sin has already been paid for.

But we will be judged before the bema seat of Christ. Not to determine whether we live eternally or die eternally, but to determine what rewards or lack of rewards our lives achieved through faithful abiding in and obedience to Christ.

Aiming our lives for the target of pleasing Christ isn't trying to earn salvation or God's acceptance. It's aiming our lives to make a difference for the glory of God. Living this day with that day in sight will never take us out of the game or sideline us. Just the opposite! It will engage us in the world, not to please ourselves, but in order to please Jesus – who loved the sinner, came for the broken, and gave his life for the messy.

Verse 11 helps us to define what aiming to please the Lord looks like: ***Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade others.***

Far from making us detached from this earth, knowing that all men will face their Creator gives us a glorious mission: to persuade others. The fear of the Lord motivates us not to hide out, hang out, or give up. It energizes us to persuade others to believe and receive the salvation Jesus came to give.

So we don't lose heart. Rather, we are of good courage.

Courage to go downward, outward, and upward.

Downward means going deeper into God's word. We will never grow in Christ apart from our lives being rooted and grounded in God's word.

Outward means pleasing the Lord by going where he went and loving who he loves. The lost. The broken. The messy. The sinner.

Upward because we have tasted of a glory that is heavier, far more meaningful, than living for our selfish pride and purposes. The glory of our God.

Let's pray together and ask God to fill our hearts with good courage to aim our lives at pleasing our great Lord and Savior.